

LESSON THIRTY-FIRST.**THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.—ON THE HONOR AND INVOCATION OF SAINTS.**

331 Q. Does the first Commandment forbid the honoring of the saints?

A. The first Commandment does not forbid the honoring of the saints, but rather approves of it; because by honoring the saints, who are the chosen friends of God, we honor God Himself.

Think of the many helps God gives us to save our souls: an angel to be always with us upon earth; a saint always praying for us in heaven, and besides these all the graces, the sacraments, the Masses, the prayers, etc. If then we lose our souls, surely we cannot say, God did not give us sufficient help. “*Invocation*” means calling upon them to help us. Every one is pleased when his friends are honored. Who is not glad to hear his parents praised or see them respected? By praying to the saints, instead of dishonoring God—as Protestants say we do—we really honor Him more than by praying directly to Himself. We show that we believe in His great dignity, His awful majesty and our own nothingness. If a poor person wanted to obtain a favor from the President of the United States, would he go directly to the President himself? No. He would find some one who had influence with the President, and ask him to obtain the favor. Why, the very persons that say we should not use the influence of saints do themselves use the influence of others to obtain favors. They never go to an enemy of the one from whom they desire the favor, but to some of his friends, knowing that a person will often grant a favor for a friend’s sake that he would not grant for the sake of others. Now we do ex-

actly the same when we pray to the saints. They are the special friends of God. They fasted, prayed, preached, labored, or suffered death for His honor and glory. He showed them great favors while they were upon earth. He performed miracles at their request. Will He deny them now, when they are always present with Him in heaven—where they could not possibly sin? He loves to grant them favors; and, as they do not need any for themselves, He grants them for others through their intercession. Again men are honored by the praises of their fellow-men. A great general is honored by having all his countrymen praise him; so, too, God wants His saints honored, for their great spiritual deeds, by the praise of the children of the Church. God is not annoyed by being asked for favors. Nothing can trouble Him, for all is done by an act of His will. He loses nothing by giving, for He is infinite. By praying to the saints for help we confess that we are too unworthy to present ourselves to God and address Him—to come before His awful Majesty, and that we will wait here in the humble attitude of prayer while you, holy saints, His dearest friends, go into His presence and ask for us the favors and graces we require.

332 Q. Does the first Commandment forbid us to pray to the saints?

A. The first Commandment does not forbid us to pray to the saints.

We do not pray to them as to God. We never say to them, “give us this or that,” but always, “obtain it for us.” In all the litanies you cannot find one petition where we say, even to the Blessed Virgin: “Have mercy on us,” but, “pray for us,” or, “intercede for us.”

333 Q. What do we mean by praying to the saints?

A. By praying to the saints we mean the asking of their help and prayers.

* 334 Q. How do we know that the saints hear us?

A. We know that the saints hear us, because they are with God, Who makes our prayers known to them.

* 335 Q. Why do we believe that the saints will help us?

A. We believe that the saints will help us because both they and we are members of the same Church, and they love us as their brethren.

* 336 Q. How are the saints and we members of the same Church?

A. The saints and we are members of the same Church, because the Church in heaven and the Church on earth are one and the same Church, and all its members are in communion with one another.

* 337 Q. What is the communion of the members of the Church called?

The communion of the members of the Church is called the communion of saints.

* 338 Q. What does the communion of saints mean?

A. The communion of saints means the union which exists between the members of the Church on earth with one another and with the blessed in heaven and with the suffering souls in purgatory.

* 339 Q. What benefits are derived from the communion of saints?

A. The following benefits are derived from the communion of saints: the faithful on earth assist one another by their prayers and good works, and they are aided by the intercession of the saints in heaven, while both the saints in heaven and the faithful on earth help the souls in purgatory.

340 Q. Does the first Commandment forbid us to honor relics?

A. The first Commandment does not forbid us to

honor relics, because relics are the bodies of the saints or objects directly connected with them or with Our Lord.

“Relic” means a thing left. Relics are pieces of the body—bones, etc. Pieces of saints’ clothing, writing, etc., are also called relics. Pieces of the true cross, the nails that pierced Christ’s hands, etc., are relics of Our Lord’s passion. We have no relic of Our Lord’s body, because He took it into heaven with Him when He ascended. All relics of the saints must be examined at Rome, by those whom the Holy Father has appointed for that work. They must be marked and accompanied by the testimony of the Cardinals, or others who examined them, to show that they are true relics. It would be superstitious to use anything as a relic unless we were sure of its being genuine.

341 Q. Does the first Commandment forbid the making of images?

A. The first Commandment does forbid the making of images if they are made to be adored as gods, but it does not forbid the making of them to put us in mind of Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother, and the saints.

Protestants and others say that Catholics break the first commandment by having images in their churches, because the first commandment says: “Thou shalt not make graven images or the likeness of anything upon the earth,” etc. Now, if that is exactly what the commandment means, then they break it also, because they make the images of generals, statesmen, writers, etc., and place them in their parks. They also take photographs of their relatives and friends and hang them on the walls of their homes. They do this, they say, and we believe them, to show their respect and veneration for the persons represented, and not to worship their images. Now we do no more. We simply place in our churches the

images of saints to show our respect and veneration for the persons they represent, and not to worship the images themselves. So if we break the first commandment, they who make any picture or statue break it also. Can our accusers not see that they and every citizen do the very thing for which they reproach us? On Decoration Day they place flowers around the statue of Washington and other great men. Does any one believe that they are trying to honor the piece of metal or stone, or that the metal or stone statue knows that it is being honored? Certainly not. They do so to honor Washington or whomsoever the statue represents; and for the same reason Catholics place flowers and lights around the statues and images of saints. Every child knows that the wood in the statue might as well have been a pillar in the Church, and that its selection for a statue was merely accidental, and hence he knows that the statue cannot hear or see him, and so he prays not to the statue but to the person it represents. Again if you can offer a person insult by dishonoring his image, may we not honor him by treating it with respect? What greater insult, for instance, could be offered to your deceased father and yourself than to burn him in effigy, or contemptuously trample his picture under foot in your presence? Thus they who treat the images of Christ or His saints with disrespect dishonor Christ and His saints.

Again we may learn our religion by our sight as well as by our hearing, and may be led by these visible objects to a knowledge of the invisible things they represent. Let us take an example. A poor ignorant man enters a Catholic church, and sees hanging there a picture of St. Vincent de Paul. He can learn the life of the saint from that picture almost as well as if he read it in a book. He sees the saint dressed in a cassock, and that tells him St. Vincent was a priest. He sees him surrounded by little ragged children and holding some of them in his arms; that tells him the saint took care of poor children and orphans, and founded homes and asylums for them. He sees on the saint's table a

human skull, and that tells him St. Vincent frequently meditated upon death and what follows it. He sees beside the skull a little lash or whip, and that tells him the Saint was a man who practised penance and mortification. Thus you have another reason why the true Church is very properly called Catholic; because its teaching suits all classes of persons. The ignorant can know what it teaches as well as the learned; for if they cannot read they can listen to its priests, watch its ceremonies, and study its pictures, by all of which it teaches. The Protestant religion, on the contrary, is not adapted to the needs of every class, for it teaches that all must find their doctrines in the Bible, and understand them according to their lights, giving their own interpretation to the passages of the sacred text; and thus we come to have a variety of Protestant denominations, all claiming the Bible for their guide, though following different paths. If every Protestant has the right to take his own meaning out of the Holy Scripture, what right have Protestant ministers to preach the meaning they have found, and compel others to accept it? The Bible alone is not sufficient. It must be explained by the Church that teaches us also the traditions that have come down to us from the apostles. If the Bible alone were the rule of our faith, what would become of all those who could not read the Bible? What would become of those who lived before the apostles wrote the New Testament? for they did not write in the first years of their ministry, neither did they commit to writing all the truths they taught, because Our Lord did not command them to write, but to preach, and He Himself never wrote any of His doctrines. Again Catholics are accused of superstition for keeping the relics of saints. Yet when General Grant died and was buried in New York, many citizens of every denomination, anxious to have a relic of the great man they loved and admired, secured, even at a cost, small pieces of wood from his house, of cloth from his funeral car, a few leaves or a little sand from his tomb. Now, if it was not superstition, to

keep these relics, why should it be superstition to keep the relics of the saints?

Even God Himself honored the relics of saints, for He has often performed or granted miracles through their use. We read in the Bible (4 Kings xiii. 21)—and it is the word of God—that once some persons who were burying a dead man, seeing their enemies coming upon them, hastily cast the body into a tomb and fled. It was the tomb of the holy prophet Eliseus, and when the dead body touched the bones of this great servant of God, the dead man came to life and stood erect. Here is at least one miracle that God performed through the relics of a saint.

God does not forbid the mere making of images, but only the making of them as gods. He gave the commandments to Moses and afterwards told him to make images; namely, angels of gold for the temple (Exodus xxv. 18). Now, God does not change His mind or contradict Himself as men do. Whatever He does is done forever. Therefore if He commanded Moses by the first commandment not to make any images, He could not tell him later to make some. It is not the mere making, therefore, that God forbids, but the adoring. What He insists upon is: “You shall not adore or serve the images you make.” This is very clear if we consider the history of the Israelites, to whom God first gave the law. They were the only nation in the whole world that knew and worshipped the true God, and often, as I told you, they fell into idolatry and really worshipped images. When Moses delayed on the mountain with God, and they thought he was not coming back, they made a golden calf and adored it as a god (Exodus xxxii).

The Israelites fell into idolatry chiefly by associating with persons not of the true religion. Let us learn from their sins never to run the risk of weakening or losing our faith by making bosom friends and steady companions of those not of the true religion or of no religion at all. You are not, however, to treat any person with contempt or to despise any one.

but to look upon all as the children of God, and pray for those not of the true religion, that they may be converted and saved.

342 Q. Is it right to show respect to the pictures and images of Christ and His saints?

A. It is right to show respect to the pictures and images of Christ and His saints, because they are the representations and memorials of them.

343 Q. Is it allowed to pray to the crucifix or to the images and relics of the saints?

A. It is not allowed to pray to the crucifix or images and relics of the saints, for they have no life, nor power to help us, nor sense to hear us.

344 Q. Why do we pray before the crucifix and the images and relics of the saints?

A. We pray before the crucifix and the images and relics of the saints because they enliven our devotion by exciting pious affections and desires, and by reminding us of Christ and of the saints, that we may imitate their virtues.